

## Special output article:

### **“Ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the scope to end GBV in Europe,”**

The urgency for collaborative action in influencing European Policymaking.

## Introduction

This paper is prepared to fulfil an internship assignment by my university depicting upon organisation's distinguished work on supporting gender equality and gender equal governance structures in Europe and beyond.

The European Union remains diverse concerning its various policies and international conventions, especially concerning the Istanbul Convention as many member states have yet not ratified the Convention which is directly impacting the status of gender equality in the European Union as a whole.

The theme of this paper is more relevant than ever as firstly this year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Istanbul Convention. Secondly, the recent European Parliament elections indicated a significant move to conservative ideas. Thirdly there has been an ongoing discussion often in negative terms of Gender and Women's rights across different countries such as Italy and in the upcoming elections, the UK General elections, and the French legislative elections, Gender has been a point of contest between parties. Lastly, the GBV and women's rights have been the focus of many supporting funding opportunities by the European Union namely its the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV).

The formulation of the argument was based not only on the pioneering work by Gender Concerns International, such as the work on Electoral Gender-Based Violence (GBV) but also on previously tested methods and initiatives. It is important to highlight that Electoral GBV has always been coined by the organization to spotlight the challenges faced by female candidates and women voters, uncovering the violence endured by women opting for their place in the decision-making processes.

This research ties in with the pioneering tool created in 2007 by Gender Concerns International, [GEOM](#) an abbreviation of Gender Election Observation Mission. A tool that highlights gender inequalities within electoral management systems, bodies, candidate lists and amongst voters.

The Istanbul Convention has been recognized in this research as one of the important instruments to help end GBV in Europe, as it is the document that defines the European Union's agenda regarding gender equality and violence against women.

The main research question for this article has been: **How can the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in correlation with the increase in women's electability fosters a Unified Europe, regarding gender equality and how far it impacts the prevention against Gender-based Violence across the continent?** This question has been motivated by the European Parliamentary elections that took place in the second week of June and the work election observation that has been conducted by the organisation.

The article argues that **one of the most effective ways of reducing GBV is by increasing women's representation in decision-making positions and the government and ratifying the Istanbul Convention.** According to the European Parliamentary Research Service, “Violence against women in politics can only be properly understood against the backdrop of women's under-representation in

politics at all levels in the EU, of which it is both a cause and an effect, in a vicious circle.”<sup>1</sup> Electoral GBV is also a huge problem in many EU countries. Therefore there is a clear correlation between women’s electability and policy-making. Gender inequality in governmental positions has extreme negative consequences in the agenda for new legislation, with issues regarding women’s rights being sidelined. Increasing women’s electability would mean that gender-inclusive matters would gain more weight and have priority and importance in the policy-making.

Illustrating the correlation between GBV and the underrepresentation of women in politics, as seen through the research on the countries that have not ratified the Istanbul Convention, will provide evidence for lobby groups to advocate for women’s electability which will ultimately lead to the ratification of the Convention, and which will mean reducing GBV in those nations. By reinforcing this idea, the role of women’s NGOs becomes significantly vital for a unified Europe and gender equality. Raising the status of gender-focused NGOs can lead to more activism and higher mobilization toward gender-inclusive policy making. Here it is important to highlight that Gender Concerns International, strongly believes in the power of civil society in policy-influencing, as illustrated by the organization’s achievements through the years, such as the GEOM.

The selected 4 countries outlined below have been criticised by the European Union for pulling out of the obligations set forth by the Istanbul Convention, and not ratifying it. The countries of focus are Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechia. According to the European Parliamentary Research Service, these Central European countries have not ratified the Istanbul Convention and have some of the lowest levels of women’s electability, as will be illustrated in the research part.

There is an urgent need in these countries, to promote women’s representation and bring gender inequalities to the forefront, hopefully affecting positive change. To offer the most comprehensive examination of those countries this output document lays focus on three categories, firstly the rationale for non-ratification to the Convention and the current lobbying, the statistical numbers of women in politics, and lastly issues, and reforms on Electoral GBV and statistical evidence of GBV.

The article firstly introduces the Convention’s aims and key principles and then will offer an in-depth research into the four countries that have not ratified the Convention divided into three categories. It will close by bringing together the research and the fundamental role of the Istanbul Convention to answer my research question and illustrate the reasons behind my main argument.

## Istanbul Convention

### History

The Istanbul Convention of 2014 is one of the most important European Union Conventions, especially regarding gender equality as it criminalizes firstly, violence against women explicitly, defining it as a violation of human rights and a discriminatory policy, and secondly, domestic violence, which it recognizes as disproportionately affecting women.<sup>2</sup> Although it became a legislative piece in the early 2010s, the document is generally based on the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW Convention](#)) of 1979, which abandoned the gender-neutral stand held by many previous conventions including the [Declaration of Human Rights](#) of 1948, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ionel Zamfir, “Violence against women active in politics in the EU: A serious obstacle to political participation,” Briefing, EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, 2024. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2024\)759600#:~:text=Violence%20against%20people%20active%20in,rising%20violence%20against%20political%20stakeholders,6](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2024)759600#:~:text=Violence%20against%20people%20active%20in,rising%20violence%20against%20political%20stakeholders,6).

<sup>2</sup> Dubravka Šimonović, “Global and Regional Standards on Violence Against Women: The Evolution and Synergy of the CEDAW and Istanbul Conventions,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2014): 590–606. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24518259>.

directly confronted gender base discrimination.<sup>3</sup> Specifically it was inspired by the 1990s change of attitude which saw the recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation reflected in many international legislation passed at the time, such as the United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the [Elimination of Violence against Women](#). The unique aspect of the Convention meaning the recognition and criminalization of domestic violence was the identification of various UN and European Union bodies of violence against women and domestic violence as a form of torture and a weapon of war, as seen in the early 2000s in the genocide in Rwanda and the wars in Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup> The Convention was a product of both contemporary international work but also inter-European research.

### Main Principles of the Convention

There are five main principles to the convention.

1. Firstly, it defines and criminalises different forms of violence against women and girls, including physical, sexual, psychological, and more importantly for gender electability purposes, stalking and sexual harassment.
2. Secondly, it prevents GBV by willing states to invest in awareness-raising campaigns and education.
3. Thirdly, it protects victims by obliging the country to establish support services such as shelters, hotlines and legal counselling.
4. Fourthly, it sets an obligation for the signatory states to collect data on GBV and GBV-related crimes.
5. Lastly, it addressed asylum and migration through an asylum policy which forces states to acknowledge GBV as a form of persecution within the Refugee Convention, therefore requiring parties to ensure the safety of victims no matter their status or residence.<sup>5</sup> This is especially relevant as recently the European Court of Justice, ruled that the Netherlands does not have the jurisdiction to deport two Iraqi girls living in the country since 2015, which took the Dutch government to court after the rejection of their asylum. According to the court in Luxembourg, women and girl refugees adopting the European Union's principle of gender equality can "be considered deserving asylum status." Additionally, they would most likely face persecution in their homeland due to the more liberal identity that they have gained by living in the EU.<sup>6</sup>

Countries that have not ratified the Istanbul Convention

### **Bulgaria**

#### **Istanbul Convention and Lobbying**

The Bulgarian court and governing bodies have not ratified the Convention due to its understanding as unconstitutional due to the country's rigid definition of gender as the biological sex of the person rather than as a social construct that ties with social norms.<sup>7</sup> The rejection of the Convention is aligned with

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<sup>3</sup> Dubravka Šimonović, "Global and Regional Standards on Violence Against Women: The Evolution and Synergy of the CEDAW and Istanbul Conventions," *Human Rights Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2014): 590–606. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24518259>. 591.

<sup>4</sup> BONITA C. MEYERSFELD. "INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONVENTION ON PREVENTING AND COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE." *International Legal Materials* 51, no. 1 (2012): 106–32. <https://doi.org/10.5305/intelegamate.51.1.0106>.

<sup>5</sup> The Istanbul Convention: A tool to tackle violence against women and girls, at a glance, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/630297/EPRS\\_ATA\(2018\)630297\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/630297/EPRS_ATA(2018)630297_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://nltimes.nl/2024/06/11/netherlands-cant-deport-iraqi-girls-instilling-gender-equality-values-eu-court>

<sup>7</sup> Nathalie Meurens, Hayley D'Souza, Saredo Mohamed, Nazia Chowdhury, Stelios Chartakis, Kate Regan, "Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe – The added value of the Istanbul

the ordinance issued by the Office of the Prosecutor that required a victim to substantiate three separate events of violence, either physical, psychological or sexual for a criminal case to even be opened.<sup>8</sup> The government has no plan for ratification of the convention in the future.

Regarding lobbying for the ratification of the Convention, a campaign took place from November 2022 to June 2023, to ‘advocate on the council of European Convention on violence against women and domestic violence’, that was organized by the Bulgarian Platform European Women’s Lobby (Bulgarian Platform – EWL) and was funded by the Council of Europe. Some of the activities that took place as part of this project were a political forum, open letters to politicians, a conference with representatives from civil society, and universities, a social media campaign and the translation and promotion of the mission of the campaign.<sup>9</sup> This has resulted in the adoption of the amendments to the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, this was characterized as a political success by women’s organizations but criticism remains as the government has not officially changed its position. These reforms were a result of many protests, the loss of women’s lives and the work of the above-mentioned organizations.

Status: The process was terminated by the Bulgarian government and there are no plans for their decision to change in the future.

### **Women’s Electability**

According to the 2023 Gender Equality Index on the domain of politics created by the European Institute for Gender Equality, Bulgaria ranks below the European Average, with a score of 57,5, this means that women have significantly less power in politics than in countries such as Sweden which ranks first, and therefore this translates into the fact that they political agenda of Bulgarian politicians often ignore the gender issues and the violence against women. As we mentioned, the paper strongly supports that these two are correlated and that is why it places attention on advocacy and promotion of women’s rights in politics. Another chart that illustrates this point also by EIGE, focuses specifically on the percentage of women in politics in the EU countries, in this case, Bulgaria also falls below the EU average, and this is especially visible in the categories of women as party leaders (18%) and women in the parliament/assembly (25%), the percentage does not increase much when it comes to women as members of the municipal council.<sup>10</sup> It is important to mention that the country does not provide data on the members of the regional parliament/assembly. These statistics illustrate that there is a low number of women in politics in the country.

### **GBV figures and Gender Concerns International pioneering Electoral GBV**

There is no commonality among the countries that have not ratified the Convention, especially regarding their definitions of violence. However, some of them do distinguish electoral GBV from other forms of harm, although not Bulgaria. According to the EU, Bulgaria has not taken any direct measures to prevent electoral GBV, in contrast to many countries such as Hungary. The country’s legislation highlights all four of the established forms of violence, which is not the case for all four of our countries in focus.

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Convention and remaining challenges,” study, European Parliament's Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), 2020,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL\\_STU\(2020\)658648](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2020)658648), 107.

<sup>8</sup> Nathalie Meurens, Hayley D’Souza, Saredo Mohamed, Nazia Chowdhury, Stelios Chartakis, Kate Regan, “Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe – The added value of the Istanbul Convention and remaining challenges,” study, European Parliament's Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), 2020,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL\\_STU\(2020\)658648](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2020)658648), 99.

<sup>9</sup> Council of Europe, “Civil society raises awareness on the Istanbul Convention in Bulgaria-Bulgarian Platform European Women’s Lobby,” News, Council of Europe website, Strasbourg, 2nd of August 2023, accessed on the 13th of June 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Meurens, D’Souza, Mohamed, Chowdhury, Chartakis and Kate Regan, “Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe – The added value of the Istanbul Convention and remaining challenges,” 6.

The country has the lowest reported rate of violence against women in the EU, but this is mainly due to the Office of the Prosecutor requiring the victim to illustrate three episodes of violence to get a chance to open their case. This is a big obstacle for the reporting of violence to the authorities.

According to EIGE, 28% of women experienced physical and or sexual violence in the country, in 2017 which is the last year there is any available data on the topic. More recent statistical evidence, highlighted by Victoria Petrova, Communications and Development Director at the Bulgarian Fund for Women, estimates that one in three women suffer from GBV in the country, or approximately one million according to a 2021 survey.<sup>11</sup>

## Slovakia

### Istanbul Convention and Lobbying

In Slovakia, the main opposition to the ratification of the Convention came from the National Council otherwise known as the Slovak Parliament, which asked the government not to proceed with the process in 2019 and the next year voted against it. After the President of the country Zuzana Čaputová, signed it, the country formally rejected the Convention.<sup>12</sup> The main reason behind this decision was that the Convention was deemed unconstitutional due to the rigid definition of gender established in the country's constitution. Specifically, the use of gender was questioned by the conservative Christians, a large number of the population, because it was deemed to leave space for third-gender and same-sex relationships that go against the national constitution's focus on marriage as only between men and women, and gender as the biological sex.

Regarding lobbying, local NGOs joined the Whistles Against Violence international action organized by the UN Women in 2019, with many of them advocating for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Since then no specific campaign has taken place in the country, but this article aims at providing evidence of the correlation between the lack of female representation in the parliament and the rejection of the Convention, which has great consequences for the persistence of GBV. This proof will in exchange, empower NGOs to keep fighting for women's electability and the ratification of the Convention.

Status: The Slovakian National Council rejected the convention in 2020 and therefore has formally dismissed the Convention.

### Women's Electability

According to the Gender Equality Index by EIGE, the data on gender equality in the domain of politics, Slovakia ranks in the last five EU countries, with a score of 36.8, this indicates that the country is far from achieving gender equality in politics and shows the immediate need to take action.<sup>13</sup> In the second database, the country does not provide data on women as party leaders. But does so in the other categories, the lowest participation of women is in the regional assemblies of the country with 13%, an extremely low number. In the other two sectors, the percentage does not rise above 28%, as women are much less likely to be elected in the governing bodies, and there is a need for more women in decision-

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<sup>11</sup> CIVICUS, "BULGARIA: 'Our society has finally become sensitised to domestic and gender-based violence.'" Interview with Victoria Petrova, published on the 22nd of August 2023, accessed on the 13th of June 2024. <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/6531-bulgaria-our-society-has-finally-become-sensitised-to-domestic-and-gender-based-violence#>.

<sup>12</sup> Council of Europe, "Violence against women: Council of Europe reaction to developments in the Slovak Republic," Newsroom, Strasbourg, 28th of November 2019.

<sup>13</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, "Gender Equality Index 2023: Towards a green transition in transport and energy,"— Report. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-equality-index-2023-towards-green-transition-transport-and-energy>. 52.

making positions which will result in the improvement conditions for victims of GBV and increase measures taken to protect women.<sup>14</sup>

### **GBV figures and Gender Concerns International pioneering Electoral GBV**

As highlighted, Bulgaria includes legislation on all four forms of violence, but the Slovakian government, in line with many EU countries, does not recognize economic violence. This is important to point out as economic violence affects women disproportionately, which makes it much more difficult to have the resources and time to vote let alone run for any electoral position. The percentage of GBV in Slovakia was 22.7 in 2017, according to EIGE with the country scoring 30.0 overall, the highest among the nations of focus.<sup>15</sup> Despite that, one in two women who have been in a relationship have experienced violence by their partners, with psychological violence being the most common, according to the EIGE 2023 index.<sup>16</sup>

### **Hungary**

#### **Istanbul Convention and Lobbying**

The former Minister of Justice of the country was the main advocate of ratifying the Convention, with preparations taking place in governmental departments and civic society organizations for the implementation of the new gender code. But as the new government took over, the process was stalled and eventually in 2020 the parliament adopted a declaration formally rejecting it.<sup>17</sup>

As with the rest of our countries of focus, the reasons behind this decision have to do with their government being conservative, extremely religious, and viewing such legislation as opposing their fundamental structures of family, in the case of the Viktor Orban-led country, the Convention was seen as a ‘threat to national sovereignty’ as it introduces ideas such as the third gender and non-heterosexual relationships therefore threatening the traditional family of a man and a woman which are seen as the foundations of their nation. This is also reflected in the fact that women’s rights are being treated as a threat to the nation.

In regards to lobbying for the Convention, in 2023 a project took place in the country between the Hungarian women’s lobby and the Hungarian organizations NANE Women’s Rights Association and Patent Association to empower communities to combat violence against women and domestic violence. It aimed at informing the general public, civil officers, professional networks and organizations directly working with victims. The activities included translating and adopting Council of Europe material, social media campaigns, myth-busting visuals and networking events. The campaign reached twenty-three thousand people and was characterized as a success despite the lack of change on a national level.

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<sup>14</sup> Meurens, D’Souza, Mohamed, Chowdhury, Chartakis and Kate Regan, “Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe – The added value of the Istanbul Convention and remaining challenges,” 6.

<sup>15</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, “Gender Equality Index 2017: Intersecting inequalities: Gender Equality Index.” — Report. Available at:<https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/intersecting-inequalities-gender-equality-index>.

<sup>16</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, “Gender Equality Index 2023: Towards a green transition in transport and energy,”— Report. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-equality-index-2023-towards-green-transition-transport-and-energy>.

<sup>17</sup> The Guardian, “Hungary's parliament blocks domestic violence treaty: Budapest assembly refuses to ratify Istanbul convention on violence against women,” uploaded on the 5th of May 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/hungarys-parliament-blocks-domestic-violence-treaty>.

Status: The new government of the country that was installed in 2020 officially rejected the Istanbul Convention.

### **Women's Electability**

According to the Gender Equality Index (2023) created by the European Institute for Gender Equality, which focuses specifically on the domain of politics, Hungary was ranked last, with a score of just 26.4 out of a hundred.<sup>18</sup> This indicates the need for the country to increase female participation in the parliament and governing bodies. In the database, with the title *Percentage of women in parliamentary assemblies and political parties in the EU*, Hungary provides information on all four sectors which indicates, the country's willingness to make progress, a positive aspect. The percentages are low with an average of 15% of women in parliamentary assemblies, party leadership, and regional parliaments, the exception to this is women's electability as members of municipal councils which is up to 30%.<sup>19</sup> However, the overall numbers indicate a clear need to promote the participation of women in politics and advocate for their electability in the government. As already highlighted, this is in correlation with the ratification of the Convention is one of the reliable ways of decreasing GBV.

### **GBV figures and Gender Concerns International pioneering Electoral GBV**

The Hungarian government has taken some measures to protect politicians from verbal attacks in debates and physical violence by setting an Article which specifies the types of conduct banned in the parliamentary sessions to protect members of the parliament, such as the use of violence the obstructing of the conduct of others and the sectioning offensive and discriminatory language.<sup>20</sup> Despite this, no mechanism has been set to protect female politicians from harassment, threats and violence, online or on location. In the country, all forms of violence are covered in the governmental legislation, which is positive as the government considers physical, sexual, psychological, and economic equality important but does not provide any specific legislation for Gender Concerns International pioneering Electoral GBV.

There is a lack of systematic data collection on violence against women, which makes it much more difficult to find concrete evidence of the real situation in the country. GBV is under-reported because the majority of the population does not trust the authorities and victim-blaming attitudes mean it is stigmatized. Hungary's gender equality index score in terms of violence is 26.7, in the latest available edition (2017), with 19,4% of women having experienced GBV.<sup>21</sup> That means that one in five women have been victims of GBV. The figure is staggering, but it is expected as the country has not ratified the Convention and has a low number of women in politics. The article argues that this can change by taking important steps such as ratifying the Istanbul Convention and increasing the number of women's electability. NGOs have a large role to play in the achievement of gender-equality and elimination of GBV.

## **Czechia**

### **Istanbul Convention and Lobbying**

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<sup>18</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, "Gender Equality Index 2023: Towards a green transition in transport and energy," — Report. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-equality-index-2023-towards-green-transition-transport-and-energy>. 52.

<sup>19</sup> Meurens, D'Souza, Mohamed, Chowdhury, Chartakis and Kate Regan, "Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe – The added value of the Istanbul Convention and remaining challenges," 6.

<sup>20</sup> Meurens, D'Souza, Mohamed, Chowdhury, Chartakis and Kate Regan, "Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe – The added value of the Istanbul Convention and remaining challenges," 9.

<sup>21</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, "Gender Equality Index 2017: Intersecting inequalities: Gender Equality Index." — Report. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/intersecting-inequalities-gender-equality-index>.

The Czech government intended to ratify the Convention in 2018 but was met with strong resistance from religious groups. Two years later, they issued the proposal to officially ratify it but was narrowly voted down by the members of the Parliament. The country was one of the last member states to sign the convention. The reasoning behind the objection to the Istanbul convention is tied to the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church on the country, and other conservative groups which strongly opposed it due to what they claim to be a gender ideology. This indicates that gender is a social construct and therefore allows for more than two genders to exist which poses a threat, according to those groups, to the traditional family values and opens the possibility for non-heterosexual couples. Despite objection to the ratification, Czechia was strongly influenced by it, changing its legislative framework to meet the new criteria created by the Convention.

Status: The government issued a proposal to ratify, but the Czech Senate narrowly voted against it.<sup>22</sup>

### **Women's Electability**

According to the 2023 Gender Equality Index on the domain of politics created by the European Institute for Gender Equality, Czechia was ranked in the middle of our focus countries with 43,4.<sup>23</sup> This is more than 20 points from the European average, a worrying figure. In the database, which focuses on the percentage of women in the government, Czechia is in line with the rest of the countries of focus. The highest percentage of women are in municipal councils, and the percentage remains above 20 for the other categories. At the level of party leader, the figure is much lower. This is significant because this position is the most important and powerful, therefore having a higher percentage benefits the mission of tackling GBV.

### **GBV figures and Gender Concerns International pioneering Electoral GBV**

As already highlighted the decisive pattern was detected among the countries that did not ratify the Convention. But Czechia stands out among the countries on the types of violence included in the country's constitution, recognizing and therefore covering only physical and sexual violence, omitting economic and physiological violence means the inability of the system to cover and protect a large number of people, mainly women which suffer from those forms of harm. It also makes the promotion and advocacy of GBV, which this paper aims to do, much more urgent and important as it will not only raise awareness of the gaps in the legislation but shine a light on the immediate need for action. Acknowledging all four forms of violence is fundamental for the decrease of GBV and the improvement of conditions for women and girls which will enable more women to participate and run for office.

Twenty per cent of women(18-74) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in Czechia, according to the Gender Equality Index, with the country's overall score reaching 28 points in the sector of violence. An interesting statistic that is available for Czechia, but not for other countries is on cyberviolence, with 16% of women reporting that they have been victims of cyber harassment in the past five years, with the percentage doubling for women aged 16-29.<sup>24</sup>

### Women's electability and the Istanbul Convention

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<sup>22</sup> Reuters, "Czech Senate fails to ratify European treaty on violence against women," uploaded on the 25th of January 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czech-senate-fails-ratify-european-treaty-violence-against-women-2024-01-25/>.

<sup>23</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, "Gender Equality Index 2023: Towards a green transition in transport and energy,"— Report. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-equality-index-2023-towards-green-transition-transport-and-energy>. 52.

<sup>24</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Fundamental rights report 2019*, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2811/303379>.

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As I have illustrated there is clear evidence which shows that the low numbers of women's electability, and the lack of ratification of the Istanbul Convention directly link to high percentages of GBV and gender inequality. Therefore, the article argues that one of the most effective ways of reducing GBV is by increasing women's representation in decision-making positions and the government and ratifying the Istanbul Convention. The countries highlighted make it more challenging to live there as a woman and dampen their future. The lack of gender equality and initiative in ratifying the Convention led to a divided Europe regarding gender equality. Despite that, there is hope that women's organizations and funding projects can change the situation in those countries through lobbying and continuous fighting for women's rights.

## Conclusion

The European Union remains diverse concerning its various policies and international conventions, especially with reference to the Istanbul Convention as many member states have yet not ratified the Convention is directly impacting the status of gender equality in the European Union as a whole.

International Conventions and policies, especially about the Istanbul Convention have diversified the European Union on matters concerning gender equality and women's rights. The European Parliament elections, the rise of right-wing populism and the upcoming elections have illustrated that Gender equality and women's rights raise some serious concerns.

In commemorating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Istanbul Convention main focus of this research has been to highlight the relevance of the IC and the current issues mentioned above. The diversity of the EU is referred to critically highlighting the refusal of the four countries of focus, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechia that need to ratify the foundational legislative piece of the Istanbul Convention of 2014.

The article argued that **to reduce GBV and improve conditions for women across the continent there is an urgency to make governance gender-equal in Europe**. An increase in women's electability status and representation in the government formation and ratifying the Convention will lead to a decrease in GBV. The argument of course applies more to the countries that have not ratified the specific agreement.

Gender Concerns International has placed great attention on women's electability, by emphasising the violence that relates to women voters, candidates and election administrators during the electoral cycle in the term Electoral GBV. The organization strongly believes in the power of civic society in policy-influencing, as illustrated by the organization's achievements through the years, such as the GEOM and supports that electing more women in decision-making positions will lead to gender-equality and reduce GBV.

With gratitude to my team and director,

Georgia Maria Andreou